

# The Railways of St.Dennis Parish

by Adrian Wilson

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## The Treffry Tramway

St. Dennis became involved in the early days of moving materials by rail in Cornwall although 5 lines were already in operation in the Duchy from 1812 with the Poldice to Portreath Tramway being the first.

Joseph Thomas Austen, born into a south east Cornwall family in 1782, adopted the surname Treffry after marrying into the family, becoming Joseph Thomas Austen Treffry. A smart move to gain the accreditation of the well known Treffry name, but Treffry was a very clever entrepreneur, mine adventurer and engineer, probably one of Cornwall's greatest, earning him the nickname of "The King Of Mid Cornwall".

He initially had interests in the very productive Fowey Consols mine above Penpillick Hill, St. Blazey, but the mine faced problems shipping ore through the narrow streets of Fowey to its port. Treffry turned his attention to Par and in 1829 he commenced the work to build Par Harbour, linking it back to Fowey Consols by a canal he built to the foot of Penpillick Hill, at Ponto Mill.

He then eyed the granite quarries of the Luxulyan area, granite was in demand and had been used in buildings like Lostwithiel Town Hall and Redruth Clock Tower. He proposed a tramway link and his entrepreneurial genius saw the prospect of extending it past Luxulyan to the Roche area and its growing china clay industry.

He constructed a tramway to the Luxulyan quarries building the impressive Luxulyan Viaduct/Aqueduct to span the Luxulyan valley in 1842.

It was a standard gauge line (that's 4 feet 8 ½ inches wide as used today on British Rail lines), it was horse drawn all the way and used an incline at Carmears to drop loaded wagons down to his Par canal.

He extended this line to Mollinis near the Bugle Inn but here he stopped, his vision was a line from Par to Newquay cutting out the dangerous journey around Lands End and saving days of costly travel for tin, granite and clay from the mid Cornwall area via Par Harbour.

But he had seen a new opportunity to complete this when he was able to purchase Newquay Harbour in 1836, he had rebuilt the old harbour by 1843.

He had by this time acquired interests in the Hendra and Trelavour clay pits at St. Dennis, Dreamers Delight clay work in St. Enoder parish and East Wheal Rose lead and silver mine near St. Newlyn East and saw an outlet for their minerals and importing goods like coal and timber through his new harbour at Newquay.

He commenced building a tramway from St. Dennis with a loading platform at Gullies and an incline up to Hendra Pit. The incline was rope hauled by a stationary steam engine at the top, trucks were let down and transferred to wooden bodied wagons at Gullies and then, drawn by horses on his 4 feet 8 ½ inch standard gauge track, set off for Newquay.

The cutting from Hendra down to Gullies could still be made out several years ago passing down by St. Dennis Band Room, I'm not sure whether it can still be made out today.

From Gullies the line went past White Gate, under the road at Domellick, through a tunnel at Toldish and on into Newquay on the line we know today. It went through the present day site of Newquay Station (not built then) and via Newquay town (the track bed can still be traced) to the top of Newquay Harbour. There a steam Whim Engine (the car park there is known today as Whim Car Park) was situated, the horses were uncoupled and wagons let down on a steel cable through a tunnel onto the harbour. The tunnel, dug by miners from the St. Dennis area in 1843, later became home to Newquay Aquarium and I believe now is used by Newquay Gig Club. A stone built jetty was constructed in the harbour reached by wooden staging from the tunnel, this jetty is still there.

This line never carried passengers and the wagons ran mainly by gravity from St. Dennis on the gently sloping land toward Newquay, I have heard that the only obstacle on its journey was Pollawyn Hill, just past White Cross, where hopefully the momentum of the truck helped the wagons to slowly creep up over it. If not the horses carried in the rear wagon with a brake man, would be taken out to help it breast the hill when the momentum would pick up again. Those horses were used to return the wagons to St. Dennis.

The line opened in 1849 but Newquay never benefitted greatly from this mineral traffic, the growth of the clay pits to the other side of Hensbarrow meant that south coast ports like Charlestown, Fowey and Pentewan were increasingly used.

In 1869 the Newquay and Cornwall Junction Railway opened a steam hauled line from Burngallow, on the Penzance to Paddington main line, to Drinnick Mill, Nanpean, and by 1874 the line was extended to the drying kilns at Parkandillack. The line couldn't continue through to Newquay just yet as a report in 1860 said that the Hendra-Newquay tramway line wasn't strong enough to carry steam locomotives. In 1870 the Hendra-Newquay line was, with the St. Austell-Pentewan line, the only horse worked line left in Cornwall.

In 1874 however, the newly formed Cornwall Minerals Railway upgraded the line from Hendra to Bodmin Junction, later called St. Dennis Junction, and on into Newquay terminating at the new Newquay Station we know today. The missing link line from Mollinis, Bugle, was finally completed in 1874 over the Goss Moor to meet the Newquay line at Bodmin Junction/St. Dennis Junction. Sadly Treffry never saw the completion of his vision of a line from Par to Newquay, he died in 1850.

Although the Par-Newquay line carried passenger trains the link from Burngallow to St. Dennis Junction never did and remained a mineral line.

The line from Parkandillack to St. Dennis Junction closed on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1966.

An interesting note here was that the Burngallow-St. Dennis Junction line suffered a loss of traffic from 1910 to 1921 when the Carpella United Clay Company exercised their right to extract clay from under the line near Foxhole, this was known as the "Carpella Break".

The GWR absorbed the Cornwall Minerals Railway in 1896

There were various short sidings into several clay and stone workings in the area, too many to detail but two other short branch lines must be mentioned as St. Dennis Parish railways and an interesting narrow gauge track.

### **The Retew Branch**

This served the clay works at Anchor, Virginia, Melbur and Meledor, and was a mineral line only, no passengers

It ran just over 2 miles, eventually, from Meledor to St. Dennis Junction, crossing the road at Trerice and again crossing the St. Dennis-Indian Queens road at Gaverigan, many of you will remember the level crossing at the foot of Gaverigan Hill.

Built by the Cornwall Minerals Railway in 1874 it closed in 1983.

### **The Gothers Tramway**

Constructed after the H.D. Pochin company of Manchester purchased the clay works of Higher Gothers, Lower Gothers and Wheal Frederick, it later also served Varcoe's Mica Works.

It ran from Gothers west across the edge of the Goss Moor, crossing the St. Dennis to Enniscaven road near Newmoor, taking clay from those works and bringing back coal in return

Opened in 1880 it had a strange gauge width of 3 feet 1 inch which meant that at its western end at a wharf on the edge of the Goss Moor, just below Domellick Hill, the goods had to be trans-shipped onto the 4 feet 8 ½ inch standard gauge track to use the Burngullow-St. Dennis Junction line at Domellick Wharf.

The remains of this raised wharf could be still seen near the entrance to the Goss Moor Trail, I presume they are still there much overgrown.

The single line just over 2 miles long may have been originally horse drawn but soon converted to small steam locomotives, four in all during its working life.

It closed between 1929 and 1931.

### **The Hendra Light Railway**

This was a small narrow gauge mineral line which only ran for about ¾ of a mile between the Linhay at Hendra China Clay Kiln and a storage shed by a loading wharf at Quarry Close beside the GWR siding near Drinnick Mill, which then gave access to the Burngullow to St. Dennis Junction line.

It was only a little two foot wide gauge line and used a small 20hp petrol locomotive not much bigger than a decent sized ride-on lawn mower, driven by one man with no protection from the elements.

It pulled half a dozen or so small 2 ½ ton capacity wagons and ran on the left hand side of the St. Dennis to Nanpean road from Hendra, crossing that road just above where Ron Golley's business was located a hundred yards or so the St. Dennis side of Quarry Close Corner.

There used to be a granite gate post on the left hand side approaching Quarry Close Corner from St. Dennis just before Ron Golley's which was one of the posts for a "level crossing" type gate across the main road.

So it's nice to know that St. Dennis parish was involved in the early days of moving goods by rail, thanks to the genius of Mr. Joseph Thomas Austen Treffry.

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